

BEFORE THE CENTRAL OTAGO DISTRICT COUNCIL

IN THE MATTER OF Proposed Plan Change 12 to the Central Otago
District Plan

ON BEHALF OF Wooing Tree Holdings Limited
Requestor

EVIDENCE OF BENJAMIN ESPIE (LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT)

1ST November 2017

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Benjamin Espie. I reside in Queenstown. I hold the qualifications of Bachelor of Landscape Architecture (with honours) from Lincoln University and Bachelor of Arts from Canterbury University. I am a member of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects and was the chairman of the Southern Branch of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects between 2007 and 2015. I am also a member of the Resource Management Law Association. Since November 2004 I have been a director of Vivian and Espie Limited, a specialist resource management and landscape planning consultancy based in Queenstown. Between March 2001 and November 2004 I was employed as Principal of Landscape Architecture by Civic Corporation Limited, a resource management consultancy company contracted to the Queenstown Lakes District Council.
2. The majority of my work involves advising clients regarding the protection of landscapes and amenity that the Resource Management Act 1991 provides and regarding the landscape provisions of various district and regional plans. I also produce assessment reports and evidence in relation to proposed development. The primary objective of these assessments and evidence is to ascertain the effects of proposed development in relation to landscape character and visual amenity.
3. I have read the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses contained within the Environment Court Practice Note of December 2014 and agree to comply with it. This evidence is within my area of expertise, except where I state that I am relying on information I have been given by another person. I confirm that I have not omitted to consider material facts known to me that might alter or detract from the opinions expressed herein.
4. Paul Smith of Vivian + Espie prepared a Landscape and Visual Effects Assessment Report regarding proposed Plan Change 12 (**PC12**) dated 23rd February 2017 (**the Smith report**). I supervised and reviewed the preparation of that report. I agree with and adopt its findings and conclusions regarding the landscape and visual effects of the proposed activities. I summarise those findings and conclusions as follows:

Effects on landscape character

- *PC12 will provide for a relatively large-scale development within close proximity of Cromwell's town centre. The increased human movement and built form will be situated immediately north of and (with the use of good connectivity) will appropriately adjoin Cromwell's town centre.*

- *The proposed roundabout on SH8B will alter the way in which this stretch of highway is used, will provide for strong vehicle connectivity between Barry Ave and the PC12 site and will potentially enhance connectivity between SH8B and Cromwell's town centre.*
- *PC12 will substantially alter the landscape character of the site itself by providing for different densities of development, a vineyard-related retail and commercial area, open spaces and wide range of associated activities. It will also alter the landscape character of the northern part of Cromwell. Cromwell's town centre will be more centrally located between relatively dense residential neighbourhoods.*
- *Looking at Cromwell as a whole, there is no landscape character benefit in keeping the site as a RRA(6) Rural Living area. In this relatively central location, a mixed use and increased density development will not be unexpected or illogical; it will complement the existing pattern of development. However, the existing vineyard or open space treatment of the SH8B corridor to the north of Cromwell's town centre is important to local character and amenity and the mechanisms of PC12 are supported in this regard.*
- *Overall, PC12 will not degrade the landscape character of the west Cromwell vicinity.*

Views and visual amenity

- *Users of SH8B and SH6 experience the site from an approximately 1km stretch of each respective highway. The highway buffer will provide a uniform appearance of the foreground of the site. Residential development will be set back and seen behind the 30m wide highway buffer area. The outer edges of development will visually soften the higher density residential areas within the central part of the site. Overall, users of SH8B and SH6 will be affected to a slight degree.*
- *Users of Shortcut Road east of the site gain clear views of the site. PC12 provides for a slight increase in residential density in the relevant part of the site compared with existing zoning. Users of Shortcut Road will be affected to a slight degree.*
- *Users of Cromwell town centre will visually experience an increase in built development within the site behind the newly landscaped park area immediately south of SH8B (the big fruit area). Development enabled by PC12 will not be discordant within its context and users of Cromwell's town centre will be affected to a slight degree.*

- *Neighbouring residential properties that are accessed off Shortcut Road adjoin the part of the PC12 site that provides for the largest residential lots. Compared with the existing zoning, visual effects of PC12 on these neighbours will be of a slight degree.*
- *Occupiers of elevated land to the west of the site will see development enabled by PC12 alongside the busyness of Cromwell town centre and neighbouring residential properties. Effects on visual amenity will be slight.*

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

5. Since the time of the Smith report public submissions have been received, Mr Whitney has prepared a report pursuant to Section 42a of the Resource Management Act 1991 (**the Whitney report**).
6. Some of the public submissions raise issues associated with landscape and visual effects. The issues raised by these submissions are also often commented on in the Whitney report. In this evidence, I will comment on landscape and visual amenity issues that have been raised that are not fully covered in the Smith report. I categorise these issues under two headings:
 - The treatment of the proposed RU buffer area;
 - The character and nature of visual amenity at the entrance to Cromwell.

THE TREATMENT OF THE RU BUFFER AREA

7. The proposed RU zoned buffer area is a 30-metre-wide (4.27ha) strip along the highway edges of the site in which buildings are non-complying and a specific policy applies:

4.4.2 Policy – Landscape and Amenity Values

To manage the effects of land use activities and subdivision to ensure that adverse effects on the open space, landscape, natural character and amenity values of the rural environment are avoided, remedied or mitigated through:

- (h) *Strongly discouraging buildings in the Rural Resource Area of the Wooing Tree Overlay Area to ensure a vineyard or treed park like character with an absence of built form.*

8. I understand that the requestor envisages keeping this area very largely in grapevines as is shown on the indicative Future Development Masterplan that forms Appendix 6 to the Smith report (and that I attach to this evidence as **Appendix 1**). Notwithstanding this, the proposed provisions do not guarantee a grapevine treatment; they also allow for a treed park-like treatment.
9. A number of submissions raise issues and/or questions regarding the treatment of this area and the Whitney report comments on this in turn. To paraphrase, the issues/questions raised are:

- Is it realistic and practical to have grapevines covering this area?
 - Is a treed park-like treatment of more merit, particularly one that involves earth mounding?
 - How much visual screening will/should this area provide?
 - What should the tenure of this land be; is it best vested to the CODC?
10. As noted, the proposed provisions provide for a grapevine treatment or a treed park-like treatment. I understand that the requestor will continue to operate its wine-tasting business and to productively grow grapes for winemaking within the site by using the RU buffer area in conjunction with other land within the site as well as land offsite.
11. I understand that the requestor has researched the issue of how best to use the RU buffer land for grape production and has established that vines would best be planted parallel to the SH8B and SH6. I am told that 11 rows of grapes could be planted in this area with a 2.5 metre row spacing. Individual vines would be planted at a 1.5 metre spacing along each row. A planting of this sort would grow 18.7 tons of grapes annually which would produce 1350 cases of pinot noir wine, equating to 12% of Wooing Tree's forecasted production. I am told that a grapevine planting of this sort is therefore practical, viable and a necessity for the future growth in production for the Wooing Tree vineyard.
12. As is discussed in the Smith report, grapevines covering the RU buffer area will soften views of development within the PC12 site, particularly when combined with tree planting along the inner edge of the buffer area as shown on the indicative Future Development Masterplan (Appendix 1 to this evidence), but will not create a complete visual screen. The same would be true of a park-like treatment of the RU buffer area unless very dense tree planting and/or substantial earth mounding was done. As will be discussed in more detail in relation to visual amenity below, while I consider that a green, soft and careful landscape treatment is important in relation to the highway corridor, I do not see that built development within the site needs to be screened to be appropriate. The subject site is within the urban/suburban area of Cromwell, I see no need to be embarrassed by the visibility of well-configured development on it.
13. In the event that PC12 proceeds but the requestor's aspirations do not eventuate, the proposed provisions would provide for a treed park-like treatment over the RU buffer area. Such a treatment is shown (very indicatively only) on the northernmost part of the RU on the Future Development Masterplan (Appendix 1 to this evidence). While such a treatment would mean that grapevines are no longer an obvious part of the site's character, I consider that a park-like treatment could be successful. Most logically, a treatment of this sort would have some homogeneity or appropriate relationship with the treatment of the land to the south of SH8B (in the vicinity of the big fruit) and it could potentially involve considerable earth mounding and tree planting. In any event, I understand that the design of such a treatment would be assessed and

scrutinised by the CODC at the time of subdivision via a (at least) discretionary process. I consider that this process gives sufficient comfort that an appropriate outcome will be ensured.

14. The requestor envisages that (assuming PC12 proceeds) when the site is subdivided it would seek to keep much or all of the RU buffer land in its private ownership in order to facilitate grape planting as described above. However, subdivision will be at least a discretionary activity and various Objectives and Policies within the CODP relate to the provision of open space and reserves. Through the subdivision process, it may be that some (or possibly all) of the RU buffer area becomes vested to the CODC or is owned in some other arrangement. As far as landscape outcomes are concerned, I am satisfied that the proposed provisions will ensure an appropriate treatment for this area, regardless of its ultimate tenure. Therefore, I do not see that tenure is an issue that is of any significant relevance in relation to landscape effects.

THE CHARACTER AND NATURE OF VISUAL AMENITY AT THE ENTRANCE TO CROMWELL

15. A number of submissions suggest that the visual amenity experience at this western entrance to Cromwell will be adversely affected by PC12. To paraphrase again, the issues/questions raised are:
- The current situation provides a very attractive, grapevine-dominated visual experience at the western end of Cromwell and this should not be lost.
 - The site is significantly overlooked by the two highways and development should be visually screened.
16. The Smith report examines the effects of PC12 on highway users in its paragraphs 6.6 to 6.24. An essential part of considering effects on visual amenity is to take full account of the existing environment. In this regard it must be noted that no landscape is fixed in time. All landscapes are dynamic and constantly evolve. The clearest indication of how this particular vicinity is likely to evolve is its current zoning. The current RRA(6) zoning provides for rural living activities with a minimum lot size of 4000m². A realistic outcome under this zoning is shown on Appendix 2 of the Smith report that I attach to this evidence as **Appendix 2**. As set out in paragraph 6.11 of the Smith report:

“Development provided for by the existing RRA-6 zoning ... allows for individual lots to be adjacent to SH8B. The open space provided for by the BLR will form part of individual rural living lots. The existing BLR prevents buildings but does not prevent fences, other small structures or other land uses. Given the busyness of SH8B, I consider that under the existing zoning it is likely that Lot owners (as depicted on Appendix 2) would fence their roadside boundaries with solid fences. Individual and differing fences,

landscape treatments, domestic activities, clutter and the like could occur within this space and would be readily visible by users of SH8B".

17. An outcome of this sort is likely to turn its back on the highway and Cromwell's centre in terms of design. In my opinion, it would not integrate well with existing Cromwell. The existing grapevine cover of the site is not protected by any provisions of the CODP or by any other mechanism. Of the development provided for by PC12, the Smith report finds:

"A user travelling along SH8B will notice a visible increase in the density of residential development within the site compared with what is anticipated by the current zoning. Residential dwellings will be located at a similar distance from a user of SH8B as under the existing zoning, however the increased density of development will result in a relatively continuous line of residential sections within the site. Future landscape treatment of the 30m wide open space highway buffer and amenity planting along future roadways and within allotments will visually break up a horizontal band of dwellings.

Overall, I consider that the proposed zoning will provide for future development that will be denser when compared with the current situating. However, it will not appear discordant with its immediate surrounds, when experienced by users of SH8A and a more visually uniform roadside treatment will be ensured"¹.

18. As discussed above, the treatment of the RU buffer area will be important to the ultimate effects on visual amenity. The requestor is very motivated to continue to use this space for grapevines and in the event that that does not occur the relevant proposed provisions ensure a treed park-like outcome. The actual treatment that is ultimately proposed will be subject to CODC approval via a discretionary process.
19. In an overall appraisal, I agree with the findings of the Smith report, that under the existing zoning there is much less likelihood of a comprehensive and appropriate treatment of the highway corridor. I consider that development of the site under the proposed zoning will bring about an outcome that is more appropriate, in terms of visual amenity, than the outcomes that are likely under the existing zoning. Development would integrate with existing Cromwell while preserving a highway corridor experience characterised by high visual amenity.
20. As is set out in the Smith report, and is commented on by some submissions, views into the site are certainly readily available from SH6 and 8B. As can be seen on Appendix 1 of the Smith report, the subject site is situated relatively centrally within the overall suburban area of Cromwell and it fronts the part of SH8B that is the central frontage of Cromwell. I do not agree with the suggestion of some submissions that a complete screening of the site, by means such as large vegetated earth mounds, is an appropriate treatment in this location. That sort of treatment is used in situations where it is desirable that development

¹ The Smith report, paragraphs 6.10 and 6.16.

turns its back on a highway corridor. This is generally a useful treatment in situations where the highway is a genuine bypass and the development in question is part of a suburban area that exists on one side of the highway only and bears no interactive relationship with the highway; it is a suburban area that is accessed from a roading network that is separate from the highway and the highway becomes a genuine corridor on its own. In urban design terms (particularly in the United States) this sort of highway is often termed a parkway. An example is the western suburbs of Rolleston that adjoin the south side of SH1 but are entirely separated from the highway corridor, often by densely vegetated earth mounds.

21. Given the location of the site within the Cromwell suburban area and its relationship to SH8B and the town centre, I consider that a more visually interactive treatment of the highway corridor is much more appropriate, particularly when we consider the proposed roundabout. The existing zoning provides for low density residential land use that would be plainly visible from the two relevant highways. I therefore consider that the outcomes provided for by PC12 represent a positive response that will appropriately preserve visual amenity as experienced from the highways and will, from an urban design perspective, assist in integrating the site into greater Cromwell and providing connectivity.

CONCLUSIONS

22. I agree with and adopt the findings of the Smith report regarding the effects of PC12 on landscape character and visual amenity.
23. In relation to the treatment of the RU Buffer area, I understand that a grapevine treatment is practical, viable and a necessity for the requestor. I consider that the proposed provisions will ensure an appropriate treatment of this area, even in the event that the grapevine planting is not done. I do not consider that the ultimate tenure of the land is particularly relevant in relation to landscape effects and I do not consider that the RU buffer area needs to bring about complete screening of development within the site.
24. In relation to visual amenity as experienced at the western entrance to Cromwell, I consider that the existing zoning is less likely to bring about an appropriate treatment of the highway frontage of the site than the proposed zoning. The proposed zoning will ensure a visually interactive but soft and vegetated edge that integrates the site with greater Cromwell. The existing zoning is likely to bring about an outcome that turns its back on the highway and town centre.

Ben Espie (Landscape Architect)

vivian+espie

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